

# Commodifying participation through choreographed engagement: the Taylor Swift case

Choreographed  
engagement

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Received 5 July 2022  
Revised 18 October 2022  
30 November 2022  
Accepted 15 December 2022

## Abstract

**Purpose** – This article examines the ways in which the popular music industry markets artists through integrated transmedia marketing campaigns. These campaigns unfold across multiple media and create multiple pathways for audience engagement, particularly fan engagement, across social media platforms. The purpose is to further theorise the relationship between artists, the music industry and audiences.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The study used digital ethnography to scrutinise the activities within a contemporary music transmedia marketing campaign, focusing on the release of Taylor Swift's album *Reputation* as an illustrative case.

**Findings** – The study demonstrates how strategically curated activities encompass platforms' affordances and industry events by making use of fan engagement across social media platforms and streaming services. Fans shift through platforms, as well as across digital and physical spaces, through defined marketing activities at specific times. This article proposes the concept of choreographed engagement to specifically address the ways in which the temporal and spatial aspects of social media marketing are used at the intersection of platform logic, algorithm economy and fan engagement to reach wider audiences.

**Originality/value** – By proposing the concept of choreographed engagement, the authors bridge the gap between fan practices and marketing practices, providing insight into how commodification of fan engagement is utilised spatially and temporally within the contemporary platform economy. Choreographed engagement constitutes a significant aspect of strategic communication and marketing. The term expands the vocabulary used in the debate on the commodification of artistic work, and audience engagement in the platform era.

**Keywords** Algorithm economy, Audience engagement, Commodification, Fans, Music industry, Strategic communication, Transmedia marketing

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

On 18 August, 2017, music artist Taylor Swift's Facebook and Instagram feeds were cleared of content, and she lapsed into total silence. Three days later, Swift re-entered the social media scene by posting a 10-s black-and-white film clip of a slithering snake, which generated a massive response from her followers, as well as attention in traditional media. This was the first of many strategic activities to engage fans in the marketing campaign for Swift's upcoming album, *Reputation*.

The release of *Reputation* is an example of a transmedia marketing strategy utilising what we call *choreographed engagement*, which entails controlling and mobilising fans to conduct specific activities at particular times and places in tandem with following and adapting to fan practices and where fan communities are present and active.

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The Interreg Sweden–Norway programme, EU, funded this study.

*Conflicts of Interest:* The authors declare no conflicts of interest.



Arts and the Market  
Vol. 13 No. 2, 2023  
pp. 65-79  
Emerald Publishing Limited  
2056-4945

DOI 10.1108/AAM-07-2022-0034

Music artists early on adapted to the internet, using its affordances to connect with their audiences (Baym, 2015; Choi and Burnes, 2013) by pairing music consumption with an online participatory fan culture (Jenkins, 2006). Initially, the internet allowed audiences and artists to bypass the traditional music label industry, sharing content at little or no cost rupturing the music industry's business model (Wikström, 2020). Since then, the music industry has adapted its strategies to the contemporary media landscape, gaining economic value from diverse revenue streams across media outlets, platforms and live events (Baym, 2018; Sanders *et al.*, 2022). When consumers are no longer paying for content, building relations becomes key to financial stability (Baym, 2015; Galuszka, 2015). Global mega-artists such as Swift strategically use streaming services (e.g. Spotify, Deezer and Apple Music) and a range of social media platforms (e.g. YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, Tumblr and TikTok) to engage and build relations with their fans and strengthen their brands. Furthermore, platforms interconnect the music industry with the emerging data-based platform economy, giving the music industry more incentives to spread content across multiple platforms (Morris, 2020; Negus, 2019).

A growing body of research has emerged recently on online music consumption, distribution and marketing, with an emphasis on either music-streaming services or fan communities (i.e. Bonini and Gandini, 2019; Chang and Park, 2019; Kjus, 2016; Maasø and Nylund Hagen, 2020). However, in this study, we sought to understand how the music industry strategically initiates and forms engagement across the transmediascape by breaching the boundaries of various media. At the study's core lies engagement and the need for more nuanced terminologies to address aspects of engagement (Evans, 2020). To accomplish this, we posed the following research question:

*RQ1.* How does the contemporary popular music industry engage fans through transmedia marketing campaigns?

Using the release of Swift's album *Reputation* as an illustrative case, we applied digital ethnography to map how a campaign was constructed and in what ways it mobilised fan engagement across multiple platforms. Swift is an established artist with the social media brand "Taylor Nation", comprising an active fan base known as "Swifties" (Kehrberg, 2015; Galloway, 2020).

This paper first outlines the theoretical framework based on platform logic, fan engagement and strategic communication. We then describe our innovative digital ethnographic method and present our empirical data. In our analysis, we discuss how engagement was constructed and introduce the concept of *choreographed engagement* as a way to understand the commodification of participation and how this unfolds across (virtual, as well as physical) space and time.

### **Strategic transmedia marketing and the music industry**

In the music industry, a broad range of media formats is used to provide a coherent marketing narrative around an artist, whose specific aim is to engage fans (Brembilla, 2019; Edlom and Karlsson, 2021a; Jenkins, 2006; Zwick *et al.*, 2008). By studying how major labels construct narrative worlds around artists, Brembilla (2019) argued that the contemporary music industry generates both cultural and economic value, building on Jenkins' (2006) transmedia concept of how narratives expand and are cocreated across media forms. Baym (2018) concluded that cocreation is central to how fans interconnect and engage with their favourite artists, in that the interest and urge to engage are inherent in being fans, thereby motivating them to produce engaging and sharable content across platforms (Fournier and Avery, 2011; King, 2010), as well as build common narratives. Cocreation generates deep attachments and strengthens the relationship between fans and artists (Arvidsson, 2006; Baym, 2018; McWilliam, 2000).

There are several ways to define and distinguish between audiences and fans (see, e.g. Duffett, 2013; Fiske, 1992; Jenkins, 2006). *Audience* is a broad term, encompassing the passive

viewer or listener of content, as well as the active and engaged fan (Fiske, 1992). However, we found it more useful to use the term *fans*, as they are at the core of co-created marketing content (Arvidsson, 2006). We embraced Baym's (2018) definition, which built on the idea of audiences, fans and fandom in the music industry, characterising fans by the "level of feeling invested in the object of their fandom and the kinds of practices in which they engage" (p. 81). Fans' engagement also can be distinguished by fandom level. The most engaged fans (so-called superfans or executive fans) are viewed as experts, i.e. opinion leaders and culture builders within fan communities who drive new content and interactions within the fan community (Edlom and Karlsson, 2021a, b). Particularly within social media, these fans function as intermediaries between artists and wider audiences (Edlom and Karlsson, 2021a). However, our study focussed on the commodification of engagement practices, not fans or audiences *per se*.

### *The contingent cultural commodity*

By strategically using social media platforms and streaming services, the music industry has developed sophisticated methods and strategies to increase engagement by using fans and fandom as marketing devices (Baym, 2018; Gamble *et al.*, 2019). While the cultural industry has identified the monetary and marketing potential of engaging its audiences, this carries both cultural and economic implications. Bolin (2012) argued that audiences are involved in two production-consumption processes: "Viewer activities produce social difference (identities and cultural meaning) in a social and cultural economy, which is then made the object of productive consumption as part of the activities of the media industries, the end product being economic profit" (p. 796). Nieborg and Poell (2018) suggested that cultural expression has become a *contingent cultural commodity*. Applying their argument to the contemporary music industry, music consumption has become a commodity that depends on social media platform logic created through platforms' infrastructural conditions (see, also, Craig and Cunningham, 2019; Prey, 2020). Thus, the music industry has adapted to what van Dijck and Poell (2013) defined as *social media logic*, with the driving forces of programmability, popularity, connectivity and datafication. Social media logic is dependent on the internet's structural shift from primarily comprising a network of websites to being dominated by commercial platforms, i.e. platformisation (Helmond, 2015). The music industry monetises diverse forms of expression across platforms by using strategic planning of fan engagement. Engagement commodification concerns platforms, but also how the music industry organises its production and distribution around platforms, so that they become data-driven processes. In these processes, content is "continuously reworked and repackaged, informed by datafied user feedback" so that it is optimised for platform distribution and monetisation (Nieborg and Poell, 2018, p. 4275).

In studying the interconnection between music festivals and brands, Brodmerkel and Carah (2016) addressed how platform-based marketing data and data analysis are part of the profit circuit (see, also, Andrejevic, 2011; Bonini and Gandini, 2019). Digital data can be analysed to identify effective strategies in which brand marketers orchestrate their audiences during a campaign by tapping onto individuals' everyday digital activities (Carah and Angus, 2018; Danielsen and Kjus, 2017). Audiences' creativity becomes a valuable resource for a brand (Arvidsson, 2006; Lury, 2009), adapting to audiences' (or fans') productive and distributive capacities (Anderson, 2013; Fournier and Avery, 2011). A brand uses audiences' organic interaction and influence on messages, storylines and media, which propel today's marketing (Zeiser, 2015; Sanders *et al.*, 2022). Therefore the production and advertising sector seeks to tailor engagement to its own interests (see, e.g. Jenkins *et al.*, 2013).

### *Engagement as an economic, social and emotional resource*

Engagement has two sides: engagement as an audience experience and engagement as an industrial concept. As an industrial concept, engagement is a central component of how

marketers, advertisers and media organisations think about their audiences, as well as an indicator of success (Evans, 2020; Napoli, 2011). Engagement is positioned in an economic context in which it has the potential to generate market value. This economic view of engagement has prompted a professionalisation of engagement planning in the cultural industry (Craig and Cunningham, 2019), by which the industry can lower its costs and “spread its risky business across a broad spectrum of stakeholders” (Fast *et al.*, 2016, p. 974).

However, engagement also includes audiences’ subjective experiences and emotions. Hill (2019) brings awareness to the emotional aspect by pointing to the difference between engagement and attention: “Engagement is more than capturing the attention of audiences; it is making a connection, and in some cases making a real difference to people’s lives” (p. 28). Engagement in this context comprises audiences’ reactions, experiences and interconnections through media. Music fans have deep and positive emotional connections and experiences with their favourite artists (Baym, 2018; Duffett, 2013). Therefore, fans generally are highly active and loyal to their idols (Chung *et al.*, 2018; Fiske, 1992).

Audiences’ subjective experiences and emotions are interconnected with how media content is crafted for audiences. Media producers and marketers benefit from platform technologies and their various affordances, as well as produced and shared texts (Evans, 2020). In a social media platform setting, a platform’s affordances shape the practices shared in a fan community and vice versa (Bucher and Helmond, 2017; Gerlitz and Rieder, 2018). The collective practices within a social group are used on the platform for specific communicative purposes (Burgess *et al.*, 2018; Nieborg *et al.*, 2020). As such, engagement entails a push-and-pull dynamic between producers and audiences, complicating the power relation between them (Hill, 2019). Audiences are pushed to consume media content (through marketing, distribution and branding), but they also pull different content by selecting what they want to engage with and giving it meaning, thereby embedding it in their everyday lives (Hill, 2019). Our study concentrates on the push aspect – how engagement is constructed on the producer side – but as we found in the analysis, this aspect functions in tandem with fans’ responses. Thus, endeavours to construct and promote engagement depend on fans participating and “pulling” content that rewards them and which they value.

#### *Communication and marketing strategies for fan engagement*

From a strategic perspective, engagement is a result of strategic communication and marketing campaigns that are emergent, dynamic, fluid and adaptive, derived from interaction and data analysis (Carah and Angus, 2018; King, 2010; Winkler and Etter, 2018), as well as agile processes that test strategic decisions in continuous loops (Van Ruler, 2019). Under such conditions, marketing campaigns have been described as having complex and interrelated activities, characterised by several coordinated messages in a seamless and one-voice manner “to bring all elements associated with a marketing communications campaign together” (Fill, 2011, p. 115). This corresponds with established marketing strategies, i.e. conducting a systematic process designed to plan and ensure a combination of various promotional elements and marketing activities, interacting with the company’s customers (Belch and Belch, 2004; Gamble *et al.*, 2019; Kotler *et al.*, 2012; Parente and Strausbaugh-Hutchinson, 2014; Volk and Zeffass, 2018) and creating synergistic effects with “consistency [ . . . ] and maximum communications impact” (Schultz *et al.*, 1993, p. 17). Working this way stimulates both top-down strategies and various co-creational digital marketing strategies such as viral marketing, sponsored user-generated brand marketing, user-generated content, vigilante marketing and prosumer marketing (specified by Gamble and Gilmore, 2013). An integrated transmedia marketing campaign across multiple media creates multiple pathways for consumer activity; therefore, it is based on the precepts of strategic planning.

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### Methodology: capturing an ongoing transmedia campaign

For the present study, an experimental cross-media, single-case approach was taken (Yin, 2009), based on digital ethnography (Hine, 2015; Pink, 2016). The aim was to follow strategic marketing actions tied to the release of Taylor Swift's *Reputation* album and capture fan responses and engagement. Online phenomena are complex, comprising various interfaces, affordances and data access levels, as well as asynchronous timelines and data formats. This requires researchers to be grounded and adaptive, as well as cross the boundaries of qualitative and quantitative methodological approaches (Lury and Wakeford, 2012; Kubitschko and Kaun, 2016; Gerlitz and Rieder, 2018). Digital ethnography provided guidance and tools for data collection and analysis, through observations and digital data gathering. It allowed us to engage with the study object (Venturini *et al.*, 2018) and elicited a holistic understanding of the context by following the flows of conversations and the circulation of fan engagement (Hine, 2015). Utilizing the guidance and tools from digital ethnography, we developed a data collection strategy called *live capturing*. It combines digital data collection tools with manual capturing to collect fragmented quantitative and qualitative data in real-time (further developed in Ryan Bengtsson and Edlom, 2021 and described below in more detail). We decided to collect data on one artist to enable going into depth with activities within a transmedia campaign. Out of the artists with new releases during autumn 2017, we identified Swift's record release as the most adequate due to her previous record of fan-driven social media marketing and her existing fan community. Swift exemplifies how the popular music industry employs fan engagement in marketing strategies, an emerging practice within popular music (Brembilla, 2019; Galuszka, 2015), as well as across diverse artistic expressions (Sundet and Peteresen, 2021; Zeiser, 2015). Below, we describe how we followed the campaign and collected quantitative and qualitative data through live capturing.

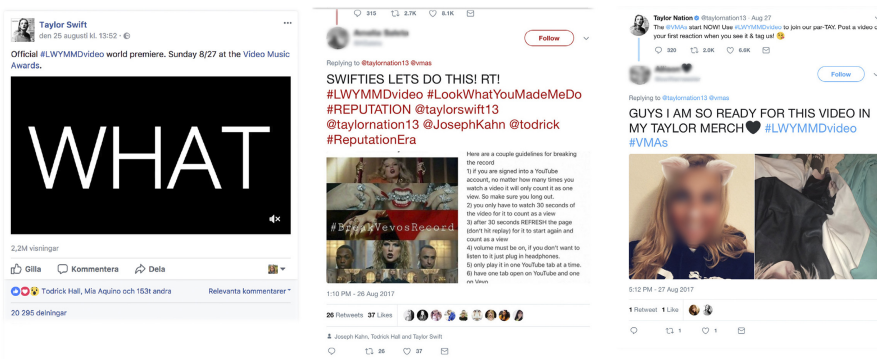
#### *Data collection: conducting live capturing*

Studying a promotional campaign demands an initial recognition of the object of study's current platform presence. Swift's social media presence comprises of official accounts on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and YouTube; additional management accounts (Taylor Nation) on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook; the official website [taylorswift.com](http://taylorswift.com); and music distribution accounts on iTunes and Spotify.

Quantitative digital data were gathered from 21 August to 30 September 2017. We used Mecodify (Al-Saqaf, 2016), a digital scraping tool specifically developed for collecting and visualising Twitter data. Mecodify allowed us to capture content associated to a specific hashtag and create a timeline of Twitter posts. 110 posts' data were downloaded from the campaign's official Twitter handles (@taylorswift13 and @taylornation13) and the official hashtags (#lookwhatyoumademedeo, #LWYMMD, #reputation and #taylorswift) resulted in millions of Twitter mentions (the content of tweets and re-tweets using these hashtags). The data from Swift's official Facebook account (@TaylorSwift) were gathered using Netvizz (Rieder, 2013). Netvizz scrapes a Facebook account for posts and their likes, shares and comments from users associated with a point in time and when in an accessible location. We captured 23 posts and 232,948 comments. We followed official accounts and hashtags to capture marketing initiatives and fan responses, relying on fans interlinking with the campaign, a common fan practice (Bruns and Burgess, 2015). Using this method, we risked missing alternative fan behaviours beyond the marketing campaign. Studying alternative behaviours demands the identification of fan-driven hashtags and accounts. However, the scope of the study is engagement in marketing, and fans anticipation to follow a marketing campaign, not fandom *per se*.

The data capturing tools were combined with manual data gathering through qualitative observations on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter and activities interlinked with other platforms, e.g. TikTok (then Musical.ly). Observations were conducted from 21 August 2017 to 31 January 2018 tracing the unfolding of the campaign combining screenshots of posts and





## Choreographed engagement

Figure 2. Posts on Facebook and Twitter (August 2017)

### Mobilising fans across social media platforms

As noted earlier, when Swift’s personal social media accounts were emptied of content on 18 August 2017, her silence made noise. Swift’s fan community speculated on the meaning of this action, which also caught traditional media’s attention. When the snake-video post finally appeared on Swift’s Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts three days later, her fans immediately started to comment and share the post, voicing their interpretations of the clip. Typical comments were “she always make(s) stuff like this to make us guess” and “she’s shedding her skin right now, and she will be back better than before”.

Before releasing the first single (24 August), a few posts per day were repeated across the Taylor Nation universe, tagged to be associated with the titles of the first single (#LookWhatYouMadeMeDo and #LWYMMD) and album (#reputation). Swift’s fans re-used the hashtags across platforms, thereby interlinking fan content. However, the activity around one Facebook post stood out in the data (first peak, Figure 1). The day before the release, a post appeared comprising three images, with no additional comment, text or hashtags. By following shares and comments, we observed that the post had triggered a visual adaptation pattern among her fans on social media. They interpreted the image to be the visual expression of the forthcoming album, so the fans integrated the images into their social media headers and personal icons, thereby creating visual coherence across the fan community.

The single’s release broke all previous streaming and radio spin records (Music Business Worldwide, 2017), but the campaign activities after the release suggest that Swift was aiming for another desirable record: music video views. An important promotional feature in the music industry is to receive the most views on YouTube during the first 24 h after a video’s release. To promote the music video, ABC’s *Good Morning America* (GMA) aired a sneak peek, which Swift’s official channels promoted across Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. Fans repeated the post and attached their own visual materials to it, reaching beyond the United States. GMA also announced that the full music video would premiere on the upcoming “MTV Video Music Awards,” tagged with a new hashtag (#LWYMMDvideo). Concurrently, the campaign repeatedly encouraged fans to post their reactions to the song and visit iTunes and Swift’s official website (to pre-order the album), along with the new hashtag.

A few hours before the music video premiered, Swift’s management accounts invited fans to a collective viewing on Twitter, a “par-TAY”, then share their reactions to the video using the #LWYMMDvideo hashtag. During the awards, fans posted pictures of themselves, often at home, waiting for the video to air. Their posts expressed excitement, with several fans referring to the music video as the start of a “new era” for Swift and that they were “in shock”. Several were dressed in Swift merchandise or posed in front of Swift posters or other Swift

references (e.g. cats or snakes) (Figure 2). Simultaneously, management continuously posted pictures from the video and the “MTV Video Music Awards” show’s promotional material.

The next collective action was to encourage fans to view the YouTube music video to try and break the record and reach more than 30 million views in 24 h. All of Swift’s social media accounts encouraged fans to watch the music video, but the fan community also drove the action. Fans posted directions on how to generate view counts and host countdowns and encouraged each other to watch the video repeatedly (Figure 2). The effort paid off, as the previous record was broken. These campaign actions exemplified how music industry-specific activities (in this case, music video views, spins and awards) are highly entangled with the utilisation of fans’ engagement across social media platforms.

#### *Platforms and place-specific activities*

Throughout the campaign, marketing activities expanded into other platforms and formats, e.g. a month after its release, the single became accessible on TikTok (then Musically), where users share small video clips of choreography or other action. The song’s phone call section subsequently has been used often in transformation videos (i.e. shifting from one look to another), interlinking Swift’s lyrics with fans’ personal transformations. Taylor Nation’s Instagram feed then shared these fan videos. By expanding and cross-referencing to other platforms, the campaign’s management sought fans across the platforms and identified where fans were active.

Place-specific marketing activities occurred in other instances. In October 2017, Swift’s Facebook account announced that 13 newspaper-wrapped phone booths (a visual feature from the campaign) were hidden at different locations in London. Fans were encouraged to find the booths and leave a phone message, with the chance of Swift calling them back. The promotion’s hashtag was #calltaylor, and fans used it to share images and video clips of themselves in front of the booths and/or to alert fellow Swifties of the booths’ locations. The campaign also organised and marketed the album through pop-up museums and stores in several major US cities, exhibiting props and scenery from the LWYMMMD video. Fans visiting the exhibit shared images of themselves inside the music video, and some of these posts were re-posted on Taylor Nation’s Instagram account.

Also, during the campaign, clips of Swift listening to the album with fans were released on YouTube. Before the album’s release, Swift invited selected groups of fans to secret pre-listening sessions in her home and at other venues (London, Los Angeles and Nashville). These sessions were released as clips posted as a series on AT&T’s YouTube channel, showing Swift talking to fans and playing the album.

We could not detect any major trolling in the data, but during some campaign activities, we found some negative comments from fans. These all involved instances in which the campaign collaborated with other actors, e.g. in a cross-promotion with Ticketmaster, fans were encouraged to register at tickets.taylorswift.com to purchase merchandise and improve their chances of acquiring tickets for upcoming concerts. Several fans commented that this was unfair and exclusive. In these instances, we could not find any responses to these negative comments from Swift or her management, nor were any of these negative statements deleted, but the activity was rarely re-posted.

#### **Steering and disciplining fans in time and space**

During the Taylor Swift transmedia campaign, we identified a marketing and communication strategy on many levels, in which content was distributed to activate fans’ engagement and control audiences and narratives. The campaign expanded across a wide range of social media platforms and streaming services using its specific qualities and audiences for engagement (Evans, 2020) through well-defined and integrated activities that the management devised, each



staged at a specific point in time to trigger certain effects. In mapping out the activities during the campaign, as well as fans' expected responses, the strategy took the form of *choreographed engagement*. Resembling choreography – in which every dancer's steps, bodily movements and positions are pre-configured – the campaign defined what, where and when to activate and steer fan engagement rhythms and tempos. Fans' creativity also forced the management to improvise, i.e. alter the choreography/strategy. These fans introduced new steps to the choreographed campaign, e.g. moving to new domains and forming new collective fan practices. Below, we examine how choreographed engagement was practised inside the Swift campaign and pinpoint the mechanisms used in the choreography, including infrastructure, narrative formatting and participatory fan practices.

#### *Infrastructure and the algorithm economy: the backbone*

Taylor Nation's social media accounts defined the boundaries, closely intertwining themselves within the fan community. Together, they formed a common space across different social media platforms. The space was specified by naming accounts in ways that associated them with Swift and using visual markers and common hashtags. Thus, the campaign (and fans) effectively used the grammar and affordances built into social media platforms' infrastructure to create a common space (Gerlitz and Rieder, 2018) or stage. The campaign also made content searchable and interconnected with and across the fan community (Bruns and Burgess, 2015) and also made the campaign traceable by management (Brodmerkel and Carah, 2016; Carah and Angus, 2018). It also allowed the management to shadow non-choreographed fan practices. Fans interlinking their content with the campaign created paths for management to enter new spaces that later were incorporated into the campaign (e.g. TikTok). Thus, traceability is a prerequisite for generating profit within the emerging algorithm economy (Andrejevic, 2011; Bonini and Gandini, 2019; Carah and Angus, 2018).

The management choreographed activities to configure and specify paths through which fans could move across and between content (Hill, 2019). Therefore, fans were urged to move from one territory (e.g. Facebook) to another (e.g. YouTube) to facilitate the affordances and grammar that other platforms offered. Fans were encouraged to be active simultaneously on several media outlets (e.g. watching live TV in their living rooms while sharing images on Instagram). The strategy promoted engagement through connected viewing (Hill, 2019; Holt and Sanson, 2014; Pittman and Tefertiller, 2015) by integrating social media platforms' practices with synchronous broadcasting. A specific event became tied to a particular time – through live broadcasting – and to a given place. Carefully choreographed events allowed social media logic to spill over into the offline environment. Strategically orchestrated events expanded the territory from online to offline and moved into new platform domains, shadowing fans' practices in the process.

#### *Aligning narratives and participatory fan practices*

The campaign revolved around the story of Swift, the artist, a narrative that had been built throughout her career. It was incorporated into strategies and executed in an integrated way to engage fans through cocreation (Brembilla, 2019; Gamble *et al.*, 2019; Zwick *et al.*, 2008). A key aspect was building on and playing into existing Swiftie fan culture and narratives. In several instances, fans' responses almost seemed pre-defined. Fans were not told what to do; they *knew* what to do. These signals appeared to be embedded in specific Swiftie fan culture practices, the most prominent being the post with the album cover, a distinct incentive for fans to alter their social media headers' visual appearance. When specific events occurred, fans had a set of established conventions on how to react (Bruns and Burgess, 2015; Burgess *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, the management could tailor visual aspects to the fan community months before the album's release. Both the management and fans used and reused specific visuals (e.g. cats, snakes and transformation video clips). Fans' pre-knowledge – and their

ability to interpret the campaign's messages and actions – strengthened the bond between the artist and her fans, thereby building the community (Baym, 2018; Duffet, 2013) while simultaneously maintaining the Swift narrative. As Brembilla (2019) noted, all parts of a music marketing campaign complement and build on the wider transmedia story.

The fans also echoed and amplified messages. Through viral marketing – i.e. strategically positioning messages to encourage fans to pass on the messages or refer them to others (Gamble and Gilmore, 2013) – the management made use of the bond among fans to reach strategic goals, e.g. setting the YouTube video views record. Pushed by the management, fans encouraged each other to view the video in a correct way to ensure registered views. Therefore, the management simultaneously played into specific music industry practices (Nieborg and Poell, 2018). These cocreational endeavours created interconnections among the fans, in what Hill (2019) described as push logic (i.e. management fostering and stirring fan activities) and pull logic (i.e. building on participation and relations). The relationship between the management and fans appeared to be dialectic and dynamic; however, our data indicated that the management controlled and used fan practices to a large extent. Thus, the fans' creativity became a valuable resource for the management (Arvidsson, 2006; Lury, 2009), who adapted messages and actions to the fans' productive and distributive capacities (Anderson, 2013; Fournier and Avery, 2011). However, it is a delicate matter, as fans may revolt and criticize certain actions. The management needs to employ new activities carefully and align them with fan bases' understandings and values.

#### *Choreographed engagement*

Choreographed engagement draws attention to how marketing campaigns are predefined to steer fan engagement's rhythms and tempo, as well as where and when actions occur. Controlling the campaign temporally and spatially defines how fans move across the "stage". Temporality concerns an activity's time and duration, generating intensity, connectivity and coherence in fan activities. Spatiality involves movement across platforms, as well as physical spaces. Through choreographed engagement, a deep communication strategy is formed, following an integrated marketing communication endeavour to create consistency, synergy and maximum communication impact (Belch and Belch, 2004; Schultz and Patti, 2009). Activities configured for specific responses allow the management to control and discipline fans, creating a call-and-answer relation that facilitates fans' engagement, as well as their creative, productive and distributive capacities (Anderson, 2013; Baym, 2018; Jenkins *et al.*, 2013). However, the campaign also follows fans' movements – i.e. their non-choreographed engagement – and when they bring new moves to the stage, these are integrated into the communication strategy. Also, as with dance choreography, in which the individual dancer has some latitude when interpreting and performing, in the study's Swift case, so does the fan or fan community. Fans' responses call for improvisation from the management, as well as changes to the choreography. Simultaneously, management also engages in improvisation, e.g. testing and exploring new engagement methods, then observing whether and when fans will follow.

#### **Conclusion**

In this study, we investigated how the contemporary popular music industry engages fans through transmedia marketing campaigns using Taylor Swift's *Reputation* album release promotion, emphasizing the strategic aspects and how they played out. Our study revealed a highly engaged audience acting on and reacting to the campaign in anticipated ways, echoing and amplifying the messages and content that the management pushed. At the study's core lies a need for more nuanced terminology to address aspects of engagement (Evans, 2020). Therefore, we proposed using the term *choreographed engagement* to examine marketing strategies through meso-level participation in the contemporary music industry.

Choreographed engagement addresses how marketing strategies intersect with fan culture, transmedia narratives and platform logic to mobilise, discipline and control fans, while simultaneously tracing their (non-choreographed) practices to identify, adapt to and colonise new spaces – both digital and physical.

By proposing choreographed engagement, we bridged the gap between fan practices and marketing practices, providing insight into how commodification of fan engagement is utilised spatially and temporally within the contemporary platform economy. Choreography was used here as a metaphor for the complex relation between management control and fan agency across diverse spaces. In this give-and-take process, fans develop their own interpretations and select which aspects they deem worthy of their engagement. Therefore, the industry carefully choreographs activities and movements to align engagement with marketing goals to build sustainable fan-artist relations. The adjustments play into an overarching strategy to incorporate and profit from engagement with the emerging algorithm economy which includes individuals' everyday practices. In addition, artistic work risk being valued through the potential of engagement in an algorithm economy, rather than work in its own right. This suggests that choreographed engagement is applicable not only within contemporary music marketing, but also within other cultural expressions that rely on fans' deep engagement for financial stability. Future studies could address these various contexts, as well as the possible implications of colonisation of fan practices into strategy work on fandom, artists and industry. In this study, the point of departure for fan engagement is the campaign. However, a further study would be to depart from fan activities to map alternative responses and alternative paths investigating a more resistant or non-conformist fan engagement beyond strategic marketing.

Choreographed engagement constitutes a significant aspect of strategic marketing, thereby expanding the vocabulary used in the debate on the commodification of artistic work and audience engagement in the platform era.

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